

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**

**February 23, 2017**

**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)**

**Governor's H.B. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM  
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFORE**

**Leda O'Connor, Waterbury, CT**

Good afternoon Senator Osten and Senator Formica, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am an Occupational therapy assistant student presently working through my internship at Intercommunity/Common Ground. The words "mental illness" immediately cause people in society to cast judgement or turn away. Because of this, the people in the mental health community are stigmatized! Society spends more time trying to ignore mental illness rather than understand it. Over the past 6 weeks I have had the pleasure of getting to know the members of Intercommunity/Common Ground. They have shared their stories with me and how Intercommunity/Common Ground has helped them in so many ways. The importance of having somewhere where they can feel like a "part of society" and not feel judged is so important to them. Intercommunity/Common Ground has helped many people go from feeling alone and hopeless to feeling like they are part of society and supported. Helping people with mental illness to feel this way will also help them become functional members of society, and that will hopefully in turn, lead to helping society view people with mental illness in a better light. I am not only speaking to you as an occupational therapy assistant but also as a mother of a child with special needs. It is my hope that services like these will be available to her as she grows and matures, so that she can feel like she is not alone and will always have the help and support she needs throughout her life. We need to provide more support, not less, in order for the people of the mental health community to escape the stigma surrounding them.

Leda O'Connor, Goodwin College OTA student, Waterbury, CT 06705